

Taking Control of Your Heart Failure

What is Heart Failure?

Heart failure simply means that the heart is not pumping blood through the body as well as it should. As the ability of the heart to pump weakens, fluid backs up into the blood vessels around the lungs and causes seepage of fluid into the lungs. The fluid causes congestion and makes it hard to breathe. Many people with heart failure also have swollen legs and feet. That is why heart failure is sometimes called congestive heart failure.

Heart failure does not mean that you are about to die or that your heart has stopped. It is a serious illness, but with proper medications in the right doses and careful management you can live longer and feel better.

What causes Heart Failure?

Heart failure usually doesn't occur suddenly-it happens over time. It can be caused by:

- ❖ ❖ Coronary artery disease
- ❖ ❖ Previous heart attack
- ❖ ❖ High blood pressure
- ❖ ❖ Lung disease
- ❖ ❖ Heart valve disease
- ❖ ❖ Alcohol abuse

What are the symptoms of Heart Failure?

The following are symptoms that could be related to fluid buildup. If you have any of these report them to your healthcare provider.

- ❖ ❖ Shortness of breath:
 - Especially when you are active
 - Or if you lay down flat at night
 - Or if you need more pillows than usual
 - Or if you have to sit up in a chair to breathe
- ❖ ❖ Waking up short of breath
- ❖ ❖ Weight gain of 3 pounds overnight, or 5 pounds within 5 days.
- ❖ ❖ Persistent frequent cough
- ❖ ❖ Swelling of your ankles, legs or abdomen
- ❖ ❖ Dizziness or fainting
- ❖ ❖ Fast or irregular heart beats
- ❖ ❖ Chest discomfort

What can I do to help myself be better?

- ❖ ❖ Your activities are very important in managing your heart failure. Take your medicines exactly as your healthcare provider prescribes. If you are having problems tolerating a medication, call your provider and let them know. Avoid antacids and other over the counter medications unless you speak to your healthcare provider. Call for changes in medications by another provider. Avoid Ibuprofen, Advil, Aleve, Motrin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatories.
- ❖ ❖ Reduce the amount of sodium (salt) in your diet. Do not add salt to your food or when cooking. Rinse canned vegetables well-and soak in water 30-60 minutes before cooking. Try to avoid canned or pre-prepared foods that include sodium. Read labels when you buy frozen, pickled, smoked or processed foods. Avoid additives such as MSG, baking soda, garlic salt. Ask your provider about using any salt substitute. Read labels carefully of low fat foods because they usually have lots of salt. Drink fluids only when you are thirsty. Avoid these foods entirely:
 - • Canned, smoked or salted meats
 - • Lunch meat, salami, corned beef
 - • Cured or smoked ham
 - • Hotdogs, bacon, sausage
 - • Sardines, tuna
 - • Pickles, olives sauerkraut
 - • Soy sauce, teriyaki, BBQ sauce, bullion cubes, Worcestershire sauce
 - • Pretzels, corn chips, potato chips
 - • Regular cheese
 - • Frozen dinners

Try herb mixes, spices, peppers, onion, garlic, lemon and hot sauce instead of salt.

- ❖ ❖ Checking your weight daily will help you see if you are retaining fluid. Weigh the same time every day (in the morning after urinating) on the same scales. Do this before breakfast and with similar clothes on. Keep a log of your weight on the attached sheet. Call your provider if you gain more than 3 pounds overnight, or 5 pounds in 5 days.
- ❖ ❖ If you smoke, stop smoking. Don't wait- quit now. Smoking cessation classes are available if you need them.
- ❖ ❖ Avoid alcohol because it can slow your heart rate and worsen heart failure. Alcohol may also interact with the medicines you take.

- ❖ ❖ Eat less fat and cholesterol. Reduce the amount of fatty foods that you eat, especially whole milk products and fatty meats. A diet that is high in cholesterol can lead to further heart problems. It is important that you eat a healthy low fat diet. If you need help with this, your provider can refer you for nutritional counseling.
- ❖ ❖ Reduce your caffeine intake. Caffeine may lead to an irregular heartbeat.
- ❖ ❖ Exercise daily. Ask your provider about your activity level. Try walking 5-10 minutes a day for a week at a normal pace, then increase walking by 1-2 minutes each week until you are up to 20-30 minutes. You should stop if you get tired or have difficulty breathing and then resume if able. Stop if you get chest pain that is not relieved with nitroglycerin. Always stretch for 15-20 minutes before and after any exercise.
- ❖ ❖ Get a flu shot every year, and make sure you have had a pneumonia vaccine.
- ❖ ❖ Finally, keep your appointments with your health care provider. If your symptoms worsen, please call your healthcare provider immediately.

Will I need medications?

In order to help your heart function as well as possible, your provider will start you on medications. These may include:

- ❖ ❖ Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE inhibitors. These drugs (like lisinopril, captopril, fosinopril) reduce the work the heart has to do. These medications have been shown to help people live longer and prevent progression of heart disease. The most common side effect of ACE inhibitors is a cough.
- ❖ ❖ Diuretics- (like furosemide/Lasix) help your body remove excess fluid. You will notice that you urinate more with these medications. Medications in this classification can make potassium wash out of your body (with the urine) and often you may be on a potassium supplement when taking a diuretic. Common side effects include accidental urine leakage, possible muscle cramps, and rash.
- ❖ ❖ Digoxin-slows your heart rate and increase the strength with which your heart contracts. Side effects may include nausea and blurred vision.
- ❖ ❖ Beta Blockers- (like metoprolol, atenolol, or carvedilol) may also be prescribed. They help block certain body chemicals that make your heart work hard and will help you to live longer. Common side effects include worsening depression, sexual problems, and weakness during the first two weeks that usually resolves.
- ❖ ❖ Spironolactone/Aldactone- helps to block certain body chemicals that will prevent the progression heart disease and will help you live longer.

It is important that you take your medicines as prescribed. Always have an up-to-date medication list. Do not run out of medications. Order your refills at least 1-2 weeks before you run out. Take enough pills with you when you travel, and keep them in your carry-on luggage. It will also be helpful if you keep your medicines in a pillbox to help you take them accurately every day.

If you are having difficulty tolerating a medication, call your healthcare provider and do not stop the medicine until you are instructed to do so.

You will be contacted by phone within 24 hours after you are discharged. If you have any concerns or questions, call the Heart Failure Clinic at your VA hospital.

Medications

[illegible]

Personal Vital Monitoring

Patient Name_____

Month _____

[illegible]

Personal Vital Monitoring

Patient Name_____

Month_____

[illegible]